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TEACHER TRAINING.

IS THE training of teachers for the Sunday school a problem of vital interest in connection with the efficiency of the Sunday school? One is not quite certain that this question should receive an affirmative answer when he studies the facts, and sees how deliberately in many cases the question is ignored; but, looking at it *a priori*, one can emphatically assert that there is no question connected with the Sunday-school work of equal importance. There is a positive as well as a negative side to this importance. It is important positively because with every day a greater interest is manifesting itself in the proper development of the religious life of the child, and consequently a vigorous and comprehensive study of the nature of the child is demanded. Then, too, the question involves the educational development of many members of the church, to whom great benefit will accrue if, for such of them as are desirous of rendering help in the Sunday school, a proper training in teaching can be provided. In this case it is apparent that the problem of teacher-training is a double one, since it includes not only the best interests of the Sunday school, but also those of a considerable portion of the membership of the church itself.

The importance seems even greater, however, when considered from the negative point of view; for is it not a thing of life and death, this ignorance of the average Sunday-school teacher of which so much is said in these days; an ignorance not only of methods of teaching, but also of methods of study; an ignorance of the real content of the Bible as well as of the spirit that penetrates it through and through? And then there are the insuperable difficulties in the matter of litera-

*A MATTER OF
VITAL INTEREST*

ture which confront those who would make effort to improve the situation, for even without good teachers something might be accomplished if a better literature could be placed in the hands of the pupils. But some mysterious influence seems to be at work that forbids this and renders much of this effort null and void.

The question seems to be as vital as can well be imagined, when one realizes the wholly inferior position which the Sunday school occupies, if compared with the public school, in the efficiency of its teaching. And this, after all, is a standard which cannot be ignored, for it is a system in the midst of which we live, and the standard of this system, in spite of the most vigorous protest, must be recognized. The fact that those who look after the interests of the Sunday school too frequently have in mind the methods and ideas of education in vogue twenty-five or forty years ago makes the question of modern methods and ideas even more than a living question in these days when progress in all kinds of educational work has been so great.

But it would be unfair to suggest that this question has not received much honest consideration through all these years. How many

A NEW CONSIDERATION OF THE OLD QUESTION training courses have been established under different auspices, and how many hundreds and thousands of teachers have been enrolled as students in these courses?

Why is it that the results produced have been so meager? We would answer this question by suggesting that, in these courses, too great attention has probably been given to "methods," and too little thought to the actual biblical content. These normal courses have followed the fashion of too many normal schools—a fashion grounded in the fancy that one might learn how to teach a subject without first knowing the subject itself. As a matter of fact, the biblical material offered in these courses has been childish in its character, adapted to the needs of infants rather than to those of grown men and women. It has been largely external, dealing with geography and outlines of history, together with lists of the books of the Bible, the whole a sort of kindergarten encyclopædic information which the teacher was expected to learn by cramming.

Almost without exception these courses have failed to reach the full content of the biblical truth—the great conceptions in their historical

development. And, above all, the "methods" proposed were in direct violation of fundamental principles of teaching and study. To such an extent has this kind of work prevailed that today a man or woman, who is able to do intellectual work of a high order in English literature or general history, will bitterly complain of the difficulty of a piece of work suggested in connection with biblical history or literature, when the latter is not even up to the grade of high-school standards.

Why is this true? Two facts will explain the situation, at least in part. It is unfortunately true that the Sunday-school teacher has been, too often, a person of low intellectual ability. *HIGHER STANDARDS TO BE EXPECTED* Too large a proportion of these teachers have been women, and too many of these women had long since given up anything that might be justly called an intellectual life. To be a teacher one must think, or at least have the ability to think. But another fact may be mentioned, and in the explanation which it furnishes we may find the reason why something good has not come, even out of ordinary material. It is this: The teachers in the Sunday schools have been trained to believe that their chief work was the preparation of the next Sunday's lesson. This conception has produced a habit which makes anything other than superficial work impossible; and nothing is more deadly than the habit of superficial work. The key to the whole situation is to be found in a course of thorough general preparation which has no bearing upon a particular lesson or course of lessons. With such a course of study as a basis on which to build, a person of even ordinary ability can gradually develop a fund of knowledge and experience that will make him a successful teacher; while without such a course of fundamental preparation even good ability goes to waste.

One of the sad things in this connection is the fact that a teacher in the public schools, who knows the necessity of thorough training as a preparation for teaching, would imagine herself able to teach the Bible without such training, *because it is of what is the Bible*. Does not everyone know the Bible? Is it *REALLY REQUIRED* not the easiest thing in the world to teach? This sentiment has honeycombed Sunday-school pedagogy and partly on this account many intelligent people refuse to undertake the work. The

churches are full of college and high-school graduates, men and women, who have read largely and who are able to prepare papers for clubs of various kinds. There are thousands and tens of thousands of people who have done special work in Chautauqua courses as well as in those of the Institute of Sacred Literature, who might do this work admirably if they had received proper training. And the real fact is, contrary to the opinion ordinarily entertained in some quarters, that the average man or woman teaching in the Sunday school is possessed of a fair degree of intelligence, and in all probability rises far above the average man or woman in intellectual capacity. It is a mistake to suppose for a moment that anything other than this is true. The difficulty is, after all, not in the character of the intellectual material at hand, but in its proper training.

In the space at command it would be difficult, and indeed impossible, to describe the ideal training course; but two or three things *THE GENERAL SUBJECTS IN AN IDEAL TRAINING COURSE* may be said about it; and among others those which have already been suggested, namely, that it shall be a course dealing with fundamental things rather than with superficial things; and that it shall measure up to the intellectual capacity of those who take it, and not be something disgracefully puerile in its scope and character. Let us propose that it shall, at all events, include a study of the growth of Holy Scripture as that Scripture stands related to the history of the chosen people. How did these sacred books come into existence; and in what way did the Divine Providence provide that the different elements which make up the sum total of sacred truth should be revealed? For one must not forget that every individual passes through the same development of character and knowledge as did the nation chosen as the agent for transmitting to the world the great truths of religious life. Let the course be one which shall go underneath the mere externals, and impart to the student who follows it something, at all events, of the wonderful inspiration that comes in connection with an appreciation of the growth of the inner life and thought of those who have led the world as its religious teachers.

And, besides all this, there should be a training in the principles of the psychology and the pedagogy of religion, in so far as these affect

the work of the Sunday school. This in itself is a great subject and demands large and considerate attention. But if the matter is properly approached, a foundation can be laid on which all one's early experience will be based; and really this is more largely a matter of observation, properly conducted, than of mere acquisition.

There will then come the special study of particular subjects in biblical work. These are many and difficult; but with a systematic *SPECIAL SUBJECTS IN A TRAINING COURSE* plan they may be taken up one by one, and gradually a fund of knowledge may be accumulated which will affect most largely one's ability as a teacher. It is this special knowledge which renders one's work efficient. Here we do not have in mind the technical knowledge of the psychologist, or the philologist, or even of the historian; but that kind of knowledge which anyone may obtain with the proper amount of diligent effort. The standard of this work should likewise be high. If one can read with satisfaction a book like Green's *History of England*, or can obtain real pleasure from a study of Tennyson or Browning, he is able to do strong work; and it is better that he be compelled to reach up to a higher plane than that he be forced down to a lower. Work of this kind will demand a thorough building up of the Sunday-school library. This is something which deserves the most careful study. Such work, still further, should be tested by examinations. It should have all the incentive on the one hand, and all the safeguards on the other, which are employed in the highest educational work. With a course of training like this as the basis of one's future work, there would be not only confidence and strength, but also earnest desire to go forward in the acquisition of new fields. Is not this ideal worthy of consideration? More by far has been left unsaid in this statement than has been said. But has anything been said that is not true?